

INFORMATION SHEET



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Aboriginal plant use

Aboriginal people of south-eastern Australia have an extensive knowledge of the land and its animal and plant resources. Many plants have specialist uses for food, tools and medicine, and were often named to reflect their use. This list presents just some of the many plants that were and are used by Aboriginal people. A number of these plants are growing in Milarri, the Aboriginal Centre Garden at Melbourne Museum.

Warning: Aboriginal people have expert knowledge about plants. Some of the plants listed here are poisonous unless treated properly.

English name	Aboriginal names and language/region	Scientific name	Uses
Silver Wattle	Warrarak [Djadja Wurrung]	<i>Acacia dealbata</i>	Bark: used to make fibre for string. Resin: used to secure axe handles. Gum: mixed with water to make a drink (dietary fibre); mixed with ash for paste to repair canoes.
Black Wattle	Warrarak [Djab wurrung], Currong [Lake Condah], Garrong [Woi wurrung]	<i>Acacia mearnsii</i>	Gum: used to secure axe handles. Bark: used for containers and to make fibre for string.
Golden Wattle	Karrank [Gunditjmarra], Tunline [Djab wurrung]	<i>Acacia pycnantha</i>	Bark: used to make fibre for string; also as a medicinal application for indigestion. Gum: eaten or mixed with water and nectar from flowers to make sweet drink.
Drooping She-oak	Gneering [Gunditjmarra], Wayetuck [Woi wurrung]	<i>Allocasuarina verticillata</i>	Wood: used for boomerangs and other implements. Young shoots and cones: eaten.
Coast Banksia	Birrna [Gunai/Kurnai]	<i>Banksia intergrifolia</i>	Nectar from flower heads: used for sweet drink.
Karkalla, Pig Face	Keeng [Bungandit], Katwort [Gippsland], Gadwud [Gunai/Kurnai]	<i>Carpobrotus rossii</i>	Ripened red fruits: eaten. Green leaves: eaten raw or cooked. Older plants: used as medicine applied to cuts and bites.
Small-leaf Clematis	Tarook (root) [Gunditjmarra, Djab wurrung]	<i>Clematis microphylla</i>	Starchy roots: ground and kneaded on sheet of bark to make dough and cooked. Leaves: poultice applied to skin irritations and blisters.
Australian Bindweed, Blushing Bindweed	Tarook (root) [Gunditjmarra, Djab wurrung]	<i>Convolvulus erubescens</i>	Tough starchy roots: kneaded on sheet of bark to make dough and then cooked.
Tasman Flax Lily	Murmbal [Gunditjmarra]	<i>Dianella tasmanica</i>	Roots and blue berries: eaten.
Spreading Flax-Lily	Murmbal [Gunditjmarra]	<i>Dianella revoluta</i>	Leaves: split and made into fibre for string. Blue berries: eaten and used for dye.
Soft Tree-fern	Combadiik [Coranderrk], Garag [Gunai/Kurnai]	<i>Dicksonia antarctica</i>	Starchy pith: eaten raw or cooked.
River Red Gum	Peeal [Djab wurrung], Be-al [Woi wurrung], Ta'art [Gunditjmarra], Dharnya [Yorta Yorta], Moolerr [Wimmera], Biel [Wemba Wemba], Bial [Gunditjmarra], Beeul [Lake Boga]	<i>Eucalyptus camaldulensis</i>	Bark: taken for making canoes. Burls: hollowed out as containers (called tarnuk by Wurundjeri). Medicinal use for diarrhoea. Leaves: used in aromatic steam bath for variety of illnesses.
Messmate Stringybark	Wangnarra [Yarra], Warngar [Djab wurrung]	<i>Eucalyptus obliqua</i>	Inner bark: used to make coarse string for bags and fishing nets. Outer bark: used for canoes and tinder.
Yellow Gum	Tarrk [Djadja wurrung]	<i>Eucalyptus leucoxylon</i> 'commata'	Oil: used for treatment of colds. Nectar from flowers: used for sweet drink. Wood: used for weapons and tools.
Ironbark	Yerrip [Djadja wurrung]	<i>Eucalyptus sideroxylon</i> and <i>E. tricarpa</i>	Wood: used for weapons and tools.
Woolly Tea-tree	Balung [Gunai/Kurnai]	<i>Leptospermum lanigerum</i>	Wood: used for spears and digging sticks.



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Scarlet Runner, Running Postman	Nall [Gunditjmarra], Kabin [Coranderrk]	<i>Kennedia prostrata</i>	Nectar: sucked from red flowers. Stems: used to make fibre for string.
Spiny-headed Mat-rush	Karawun [Woi wurrung]	<i>Lomandra longifolia</i>	Stems: split to make fibre for baskets.
River Mint	Poang-gurk [Djab wurung]	<i>Mentha australis</i>	Used as a food flavouring. Leaves: crushed and inhaled for treatment of coughs and colds.
Yam Daisy	Murnong [Wathaurong, Wurundjeri], Pun'yin [Djab wurung]	<i>Microseris lanceolata</i>	Staple food. Tuber: eaten raw and cooked.
Climbing Lignum	Karren [Wemba Wemba]	<i>Muehlenbeckia adpressa</i>	Fruit: made into flour.
Common Reed	Charr-ak [Djadja wurrung], Kaerk [Djab wurrung], Taark [Gunditjmarra], Jaark [Lake Boga], Djarg [Wemba Wemba, Wergaia], Kowat [Gunai/Kurnai]	<i>Phragmites australis</i>	Roots: eaten. Stems: used as spear shafts and to make fibre for baskets. Stems: dried and cut for use in necklaces and nose ornaments. Sharp edges of reed: provided ready cutting utensil.
Common Tussock Grass	Bobat [Woi wurrung]	<i>Poa labillardierei</i>	Stem: used to make fibre for baskets, mats and to make string used for bags and nets.
Large Kangaroo Apple	Mookitch , Mayakitch [Gunditjmarra]	<i>Solanum laciniatum</i>	Ripened red fruit: eaten.
Water Ribbons	Ngareli [Wemba Wemba], Pol-an-go [Wathaurong]	<i>Triglochin procera</i>	Staple food along Murray River. Sweet or starchy tubers: usually cooked.
Austral Grass-tree	Bukkup [Gunditjmarra], Kawee [Djab wurrung], Baggup [Wurundjeri]	<i>Xanthorrhoea australis</i>	Used to make fire sticks. Nectar from flower heads: used as drink. Young leaves and roots: eaten. Resin: adhered to ends of stone knives and used to secure axe handles.
Common Nardoo	Dullum Dullum [Wemba Wemba]	<i>Marsilea drumondii</i>	Roots: made into dough and cooked. Spores: either roasted or ground to make flour.
Woolly Tea-tree	Balung [Gunai/kurnai]	<i>Leptospermum lanigerum</i>	Wood: used for spears and digging sticks. Medicinal application for chest and breathing disorders and treatment for scabies.
Kangaroo Grass	Wooloot [Gunditjmarra]	<i>Themada triandra</i>	Stems: used to make fibre for string used in nets. Seeds: ground for flour.
Cumbungi	Poorteetch [Gunditjmarra]	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	Roots: cooked and eaten and to make fibre for string.
Common Sedge	Bungud [Wemba Wemba]	<i>Carex tereticaulis</i>	Stems: used to make fibre for baskets.
Black She-oak	Gneering [Gunditjmarra], Wayetuck [Woi wurrung]	<i>Allocasuarina littoralis</i>	Wood: used to make boomerangs.
Old Man Weed, Common Sneeze Weed	Gukwonderuk [Wotjobaluk]	<i>Centipedia cunninghamii</i>	Medicinal application in for treatment of colds and chest complaints.
Austral Crane's Bill	Terrat [Woiwurrung]	<i>Geranium solanderi</i>	Medicinal application in treatment of diarrhoea.

Further reading

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